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C O N F I D E N T I A L WARSAW 000487

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/13/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ENRG](#) [PHUM](#) [GM](#) [PL](#)
SUBJECT: POLISH PRESIDENT KACZYNSKI'S FIRST VISIT TO
GERMANY (EVER)

REF: BERLIN 721

Classified By: Political Counselor Mary Curtin, reasons 1.4b,d

¶1. (C) Summary: Polish government and German embassy officials judged Polish President Lech Kaczynski's March 8-9 visit to Berlin (his first-ever visit to Germany, "besides the Frankfurt airport," as he put it) a success, although low expectations and an evident sense of relief that it had not gone worse contributed to that view. Polish officials were pleased that Kaczynski conveyed his determination to defend Polish interests vigorously, highlighting concerns about the Baltic gas pipeline, historical relativism, and the future of the European Union. The Germans, meanwhile, had braced themselves for a difficult visit and were encouraged that Kaczynski had made an effort to moderate his approach on these and other issues. Both sides agreed that the meetings had gone well on a personal level between Kaczynski and Chancellor Merkel and, especially, between the Polish president and his counterpart, German President Koehler. The visit provided some signs that the normally aloof and suspicious Kaczynski may yet warm up to the Germans -- or, at least, that he recognizes the importance of engagement with Poland's western neighbor. End summary.

¶2. (U) Kaczynski himself assessed his visit to Berlin as "breaking the ice," declaring that better Polish-German relations are now possible. At a post-trip press event to review his discussions with German leaders, Kaczynski emphasized that he had raised his objections to the German-Russian Baltic gas pipeline and to the establishment of a Berlin center on post-World War II German expellees, and that he had also spoken out against the draft EU constitution and a federal Europe. Although clear differences remain on these issues, Kaczynski reported that he had been satisfied with talks he described as open and constructive.

¶3. (C) Polish officials were enthusiastic about Kaczynski's performance in Berlin, maintaining that he had sent clear signals about the new president's and government's resolve to defend national interests -- whether in response to challenges to Polish energy security or to attempts to "falsify history." Kaczynski's foreign affairs director, Mariusz Handzlik, observed to us that the president was "tough," but without giving offense. German leaders now have a better understanding of the new Polish president and his priorities, Handzlik said, which will contribute to a more healthy relationship. Handzlik downplayed the significance of the heavy criticism directed against Kaczynski in the German press, suggesting that, though exaggerated, Kaczynski's parochial image abroad is not entirely inaccurate. The Polish president, he said, shares and represents the concerns of real, everyday Polish people.

¶4. (C) The German Embassy political counselor confirmed that Berlin was well aware of Kaczynski's sensitivity to perceived slights, and took extra care to give the Polish president a warm and respectful reception. Their efforts paid off, as

both official and media accounts of Kaczynski's demeanor during the visit noted that he relaxed visibly and seemed to enjoy a good rapport with both Merkel and Koehler. Handzlik allowed that the Germans may have been worried about the visit beforehand, but Kaczynski himself -- who had never before set foot in Germany -- was not sure what to expect, either. Without ceding much, if any, ground on substance, Merkel reportedly managed to win Kaczynski over and to get him to lower his usual reserve. Handzlik said that Kaczynski especially enjoyed his exchanges with Koehler (which were long on history, Kaczynski's favorite subject) and that the Polish president readily accepted Koehler's invitation to attend a June World Cup match in Dortmund between the Polish and German teams.

15. (C) Among signs that the ice may have indeed broken were modest concessions from Kaczynski on even those most contentious bilateral issues. The Polish president appeared to accept, however grudgingly, Merkel's assertion that the Baltic gas pipeline will be built. Kaczynski explicitly endorsed Polish participation in a "Memory and Solidarity" network (agreed a year ago by Polish, German, Slovak and Hungarian governments) to commemorate refugees, even as he maintained his firm opposition to a Berlin center. Although Kaczynski underscored differences with his German hosts on the future of the EU, German embassy officials here note that his remarks could have been much more aggressive -- attacking German and French domination of the EU, for example. Perhaps most encouraging was Kaczynski's evident interest in stepping up bilateral contacts, agreeing not only to travel again for the football match, but also to receive Koehler in Poland on no fewer than three occasions in the next few months.

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